DCPL #65 Remember

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AS I REMEMBER

By

George Kirchhubel

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"How old was I when I first met Old Rivers?
Seems, that was a long time ago . . . . . "

These are the opening words from a song recorded by the late Walter Brennan, superactor and Oscar winner. I find myself going back and wondering, how old was I when I first met Remie Sanders? A long time ago. In fact, I was being taken to start kindergarten by my mother. We only had one classroom that was combined with the first grade, on the corner of Knowles and Miriam Streets. On the way to school we had to pass Remi's home, and I became acquainted with him.

Ray, as he was known, and as I will refer to him from now on, was raising Belgian Hare rabbits. I found myself interested in these animals, and asking him questions. Ray, being a warm and likeable person, was generous in giving me information concerning the raising and care of the animals.

Some years later, I decided to raise rabbits on my own. My parents had three lots, and so there was ample space to build a couple of hutches. As Daly City was a wide-open space in those days, I decided to raise them with greens. Ray, who was working and still keeping a few rabbits, was feeding them alfalfa and grain. The difference in feeding was where you raised rabbits on greens, you do not give them water.

As time went by, I found myself building more and more hutches.

Rabbits became the main source of meat in our family's diet. My father was taking two rabbits, twice a week, for the table. So my mother was at her wits'end to find new ways to prepare them.

Sometimes in the very dry seasons, when greens were hard to come by, I would have to buy alfalfa. It was during one of these times, on a Sunday afternoon, I had walked the Ocean Shore railroad tracks almost to Thornton Beach to get a sack of greens. As I was going back, at about what is now the Ben Franklin Elementary School, coming the other way was Remie Sanders. As he neared, I said, "Hello Ray, what are you doing out here?"

He answered, "My rabbits are off their feed, and I am looking for some milkweed. I haven't been able to find any yet."

"Come back with me, and I'll show you a nice patch of it." I replied.

A little ways off from the tracks, behind some willow trees, he filled about a quarter of his sack. I insisted that he fill it all, and he said, "George, this is more than enough. I just want to give them a small amount. Too much might give them dysentery."

We proceeded to walk back home. After a few minutes of walking, I said to Ray, "Look, there's the old swimming hole."

Ray was silent as we walked on. I feared I had said something to hurt his feelings, and then it came. He stopped and said, "George, I am going to tell you something I haven't told anyone."

He went on, "Do you remember when Buddy Anderson drowned?"

"Yes, I heard it from his cousins, but we were a little too young to know how it happened." I answered.

"Today is the first day since Buddy's death that I have set foot on these railroad tracks. Buddy and I were the best of friends. We were always together whenever possible. Our favorite place was Thornton Beach. Seldom was anyone there. It was as though the beach and the large ocean were ours."

"During the summer school vacation period, we were going to the beach nearly every weekday. Mother would make some sandwiches and put them in a paper bag and tell me, 'Ray, you're not to go in the ocean.'"

"On the beach, in those days, there was a great deal of driftwood. Buddy had got hold of a smooth plank, and soon he was paddling in the shallow water. Before going home, we would carry it to the bank so it would not be carried out by the incoming tide. Soon Buddy learned to manipulate the currents and breakers. Each day he ventured farther, until he was passed the breakers, and the water there was calm. Then, there he would have a great time, kicking around in the quiet waters."

"On this day that I cannot forget, we had wandered around the beach looking at rocks and shells. We ate our sandwiches, and then we stretched out on the beautiful white sands of the beach. Is that sand still there, George?"

I nodded yes. And he went on, "After awhile Buddy decided to take his board in the water. I helped him carry it to the ocean where we threw it into the shallow water. I watched Buddy admiringly, as he manipulated the board through the breakers until he was in the calm area. There, he kicked around having a great time."

"I then proceeded to gather some firewood, so Buddy could dry him-

self when he got out. After starting a nice fire, I looked out and saw Buddy stretched out on top of the plank. It looked like he was resting. I went about taking care of the fire, then spun around as I heard a cry for help."

A big swell had washed Buddy from the plank and carried him into the breakers. Now it occurred to me, Buddy can't swim. I was in a panic; I was in the water, and then the moment of truth came, neither of us could swim! I looked for a plank or board. Maybe I could do what Buddy had done. Luckily, there was none. I looked and looked, and it was obvious the undertow had gotten him. That ocean was so big, and I was so small. What could I do?"

"I went up and down the beach, sometimes running if I thought I saw something. I don't know how long it was, when finally there was an object being washed ashore some 200 yards in the direction of Mussel Rock. I ran to it, and there was Buddy! I dragged him by the legs up into the sand, and hoped there would be life in him. No, Buddy was dead. I could only drag him to the bank where his body would be safe from the high tide."

" The sun was going down as I started homeward. What can I say to his mother and pop? I was in a daze, as I walked along the tracks. Finally, I was crossing Junipero Serra Boulevard, then the Southern Pacific tracks, to the short rise by the Vista Grande Park and Niantic Street. I noticed a lamp lit in the little cottage near the corner. It came to me this was Constable Pankovich's house. I went up and rapped on his door."

"He opened the door, and knowing me through his friendship with my mother and father, he asked me to come in. I told him what had happened, and where I had left the body. He said he would hitch his horse and wagon, and get some deputies to assist him in bringing the body back. I told him I would go back with him, but he said, 'You go to Buddy's house and tell his mom and pop what happened.'"

"In a little while I knocked at their door, and Mrs. Anderson said, 'Hello Ray, we were beginning to worry about you. Where's Buddy?'"

"I blurted out, 'Mrs. Anderson, Buddy is never coming home again. He drowned in the ocean.'"

"She let out a scream and ran into another room shrieking to her husband,'Carl, Buddy is dead! He drowned in the ocean!'"

"When I heard their cries, I could not stand it. I ran all the way home."

"I went into the house, and my mother sensed something was wrong. 'What is it?' she asked."

"I told her what had happened. She tried to console me. Then said, 'I'll get you a glass of milk, and you'll feel better.'"

"I told her I was going to my room."

"Papa will be in soon. I'll tell him what happened,' she said."

"My father came home, and mother and he began to eat their dinner. I could hear them talking in low tones. After they had eaten, he came to see me. He assured me that I was a good boy and that I had done everything I could under the circumstances. 'This life can be cruel. Tragedy befalls all of us in the course of our lives. Sometimes it seems un-

fair, to have it occur to one so young, but cruel as it may seem, somewhere there is a reason.' I appreciated his kindness and concern; yet, I could not be placated."

"As the hours got longer, I tossed and tossed. Why did we have to go today? Why could it not have been me instead of Buddy? Why couldn't we swim? Why don't people teach the young to swim? Finally, I got up and made a vow to heaven: If ever it would be in my power, I swear that every boy and girl in this city will have the opportunity to learn to swim. After that, I felt better, and slept till late in the morning."

We were just about home, as Ray concluded his story, I said, "So long." And he continued his walk home.

From this point on I saw little of Ray. The United States had gone to war against Germany. The next I knew, Ray had joined the service. After the war, he came home to live again with his folks.

Later he married Susie Klos. They bought the home she lived in from her father. Their marriage was blessed with two daughters.

Ray was a good family man and he worked steadily. He became involved in the formation of Old Glory Post #2044, Veterans of Foreign Wars, and later he became their commander.

From this time until the beginning of 1932, I know little of anything to write about Ray. Although Susie and Ray lived down the next street from us, our talks on the street were only hellos and small talk. So from here on, some strange events were to happen.

We had started a political organization called the Voters' League.

The purpose was to elect two councilmen in the forthcoming election in April. The two candidates endorsed by the League were Andrew Chesney, the volunteer fire chief of the City, and John Fahey, a realtor. After a strenuous campaign, both our candidates were beaten. Fahey lost by only fourteen votes.

The next morning we were in Fahey's office on Mission Street, feeling glum. One of our workers came in and told us that in Precinct B, in the Crocker Tract, a batch of votes favorable to our ticket had been thrown out.

It was decided, after additional confirmation had been attested to by others at this precinct, that we should file by law for a recount.

The recount was held in Department Two with Judge Franklin Schwartz presiding. Sure enough, when it came to Precinct B, there was a change; as I remember, of twenty-two votes in our favor. The end result being, instead of Fahey being the loser by fourteen, he was the winner by eight.

And now the League was on its way, deciding to run dairyman, Al Witt against incumbent Supervisor, Thomas Hickey. Hickey was considered unbeatable, having served in that capacity for sixteen years. Yet, when the votes were counted that last Tuesday in August of 1932, Witt was the winner.

For the League now, there seemingly were no new fields to conquer. I was in Fahey's office one morning, when he said to me, "You know there's a trustee office open in the Jefferson High School District. We ought to run someone." Continuing he said, "There's a nice young man in your neighborhood who would make an ideal candidate, Remi Sanders."

I said, "Why don't you ask him?"

He answered that he had, and Remi wasn't interested. "You know Ray well. He is married to your cousin. Maybe you can persuade him."

I said, "All right, Jack. I will see what I can do."

That evening about six o'clock, I met Ray coming home from work. I told him I would like to come to his home for a talk after he had his dinner. He said, "Fine, Susie will have it on the table when I get home."

"Will seven o'clock be O.K.?" I asked.

"Fine," he answered. "We will see you then."

When I got there, Susie answered the door and took me into the parlor. Ray was inside, so I got to the business I was there for. I also asked Susie to stay, as it was a decision that concerned them both.

When we got through our discussion of his filing the nomination papers for High School Trustee, I asked them to talk it over seriously, and to let me know of their decision. They assured me they would call and let me know. The next evening Ray called to tell me they had decided that he would run.

After the election which he won handily, Ray for the next two years attended the meetings and learned. In the next election Pearl Jones, one of our neighbors, was elected to the high school board. Somewhere in the transition of the board, Ray became the chairman. As if it were a bolt from the blue, the school board was calling for a bond election of, as near as I can remember, for $30,000 to build a gymnasium.

The entire district was indignant; Don't these people know, we are in the worst depression this country has ever been? Why spend such money

in tomfoolery and pleasure, when we don't have enough money for food? Where are we going to get this amount of money to pay?

Yes, the arguments were loud and clear, when the issue was submitted to the people. I talked to Ray and told him the people's reaction to the bonds. He told me that there would hardly be another time this could be accomplished so cheaply. Then he put it on the line to me; inside the gym, there was to be a swimming pool the width of the structure.

He went on, "You, George, are the only one that knows how I feel about this project. I am going to work with all my energy to win this bond election. I am going to need all the help I can get to put it over.

I assured him that I was confident we not only would vote for the bonds, but we would actively work for them.

From that day on to the election, I saw little of Ray. Whenever we met, it was "Hello, I gotta get a bite to eat, have some people I must see." On Sundays, he left early in the morning and continued electioneering the entire day.

Little by little, the campaign was gaining momentum. The other board members became more actively concerned. Prominent people were coming into the fold. As election date was nearing, now you were hearing, "the bonds have a good chance of passing." This was the impetus, the approval needed. On election day there was a quiet confidence; the voters of the district would vote their endorsement.

That night, the votes were counted. It was a delightful result. The measure carried almost four to one.

It has always been a surprise to me, in looking back, how fast things moved in those days. Selling the bonds, and building the gymnasium in such a short period of time. The modern geniuses would still have the plans on the drawing boards, and there it was; a beautiful gym from every standpoint. It was spacious, well-aired, had a gallery section upstairs, athletic equipment for basketball, wrestling, tumbling, gymnastics, badmintion, etc. But the real treat was at the far west end, the tiled and illuminated swimming pool, open to the public in the evenings and on Saurdays. Supervisors watched the gym and pool areas paid by funds from the Federal WPA.

About this time, the school board passed a motion making Swimming a part of the school Physical Education Program. Every student, except those physically unable to participate, would be required to learn to swim and progress in the art.

A short time after the dedication of the Gym, I saw Ray. Jokingly I asked him if now he was satisfied. He told me there was nothing he had ever done that he had worked harder for, and if he had to do it all over again to attain the same objective, he would start at once. "Do me a favor, George," he asked. "Please don't say anything about why this was so important to me."

It has been years since Ray left Susie and the family, and joined his old pal, Buddy. I feel that I am breaking no moral obligation by writing the story at this time, and in justification, due credit should be given to this man; for the safeguards fostered by him to protect our youth.

There is an old saying that fits well for this story:

"Nature moves in mysterious ways,
Her wonders to perform."

(The changing of one word can apply here to this truism.)

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